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U.S. Naval Historic Center
11 September Project
Civilian Response

Interview with Master Sergeant Noel Sepulveda

[DISC THREE]

MASTER SERGEANT NOEL SEPULVEDA: Real good. Am I going to be able to get a copy of this?

LAURA: Indeed. What they are going to do is once they compile all the oral histories, they are going to send them out, get them transcribed. And, if I could get your email address, I could have someone contact you.

MASTER SERGEANT NOEL SEPULVEDA: That would be great. Yeah, my email address is very simple. It's noel, N-O-E-L, .sepulveda, S-E-P-U-L-V-E-D-A, @pentagon.af.mail.

LAURA: Pentagon.af.mail.

MASTER SERGEANT NOEL SEPULVEDA: Yes, Ma'am.

LAURA: Okay. We'll make sure we get a copy to you as soon as we can. It probably won't be until after the holiday sometime.

MASTER SERGEANT NOEL SEPULVEDA: No, that sounds fine.

LAURA: Okay. If you could please state your full name?

MASTER SERGEANT NOEL SEPULVEDA: You want rank and everything?

LAURA: Yeah, that'd be great.

MASTER SERGEANT NOEL SEPULVEDA: All right. Master Sergeant NOEL SEPULVEDA.

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LAURA: Okay. And, how long have you been with the Air Force?

MASTER SERGEANT NOEL SUPELVEDA: I have been with Air Force since 12 April 1969.

LAURA: Okay. And, what is your current position? Who do you work for?

MASTER SERGEANT NOEL SUPELVEDA: Currently, I am the IMA Reserve Program Manager for XP.

LAURA: Okay. And, what does IMA stand for?

MASTER SERGEANT NOEL SUPELVEDA: Individual Mobilization Augmentee.

LAURA: Okay. How long have you been working for that?

MASTER SERGEANT NOEL SUPELVEDA: I got here on the 22nd of March of 2000.

LAURA: Okay. And, are you working at the Pentagon?

MASTER SERGEANT NOEL SUPELVEDA: Actually, our office is at 4040 North Fairfax Drive, Suite 204, in Arlington, Virginia.

LAURA: Okay. So, what were you doing at the Pentagon that day?

MASTER SERGEANT NOEL SUPELVEDA: Well, I had just, I was working, taking a test for, promotion test for my Course 5, to go from Master Sergeant to Senior Master Sergeant. And, I was on my way to take that test at the Pentagon that morning.

LAURA: Okay. You were on your way. Do you remember what time it was when you came into the building?

MASTER SERGEANT NOEL SUPELVEDA: It was roughly around 9:20 or so, around there, when I got to the Pentagon. And, I actually called up to the testing center to let them know that I was running a little late and that I was at south parking on my way up to the building. And, I was actually by the, by the corridor entrance to go into the building when I was told, don't bother, that the testing had been cancelled for that day.

LAURA: Okay. Was the testing cancelled as a result of the World Trade Center?

MASTER SERGEANT NOEL SUPELVEDA: Yes, Ma'am. That's what they told me, and, I asked them why, because, you know, and, they said, well, you know, you heard about the World Trade Center? Now, at that time, I had heard that a plane had hit one of the towers. I did not know that both towers had been hit at that time. Because I was, earlier in the morning I was at a First Sergeant's meeting at Boeing. So, that's why it took me, you know, I left there just as somebody came and said, you got to turn on the TV, I heard something about, you know, the World Trade Center getting hit. And, then, I was just walking out as somebody was talking about that.

LAURA: Okay. So, you arrived at the Pentagon. They told you that the testing was cancelled.

MASTER SERGEANT NOEL SUPELVEDA: Right. And, then, and I said, well, what does, you know, an accident at the World Trade Center

have to do with counting tests? And, they said, no, Sir, both towers have been hit. And that's when I found out that the second tower had been hit. And then they told me, they, we believe that we are under a terrorist attack. So, I immediately turned around and started walking back towards my motorcycle. My motorcycle was parked way at south parking, near the 27th Street, 27th Highway underpass, near there. And, that's where I observed, as I was walking to the motorcycle, I observed the plane. I mean, you know, and normally, I wouldn't have given it a whole lot of attention, but, because of what I just heard and seen where that plane was, it was not in the proper glide path to land at Reagan National. Because, normally, you know, I, you watch planes coming down into Reagan all the time, and they are usually coming down the Potomac. They don't go over the Pentagon at all. So, you know, I was [unintelligible] and I just, you know, but I just kept walking to my, towards my motorcycle. And then I watched him dropping, and I, you know, I'm thinking to myself, does this guy know what he's doing? You know, because I thought the [unintelligible] was, he's just probably trying to get back, you know, get landed quickly. That's what, these are some of the things that are just going through my mind. But then I saw him, you know, he put down his landing gear, and, I'm like, you know, what, does he know what he's doing? And, dropped even down further. When he dropped down even further, after

coming over Henderson Hall and the Sheraton Hotel there, he hit a light pole. When he hit the light pole, he, it kind of flew up into a 45 degree angle, where one wing was high, one wing was low. He tried to recover slightly and he sheared off the second light pole with the, with the left wing. And that brought him back down to a 45 degree angle. And, at that time, you could hear, and I, that's when I knew, you know, this doesn't look good. You know, he, he dropped just a little bit more and you can hear the engines powering up, you know, full power. Like, when you are sitting on the runway and you hear them powering up to take off, you can hear the engines revving up really high, and then the plane just like shot into the Pentagon itself at a 45 degree angle, one wing [inaudible]. And, [inaudible].

LAURA: Can you hold on one second? I'm having trouble hearing you. Are you still there?

MASTER SERGEANT NOEL SUPELVEDA: Yes, I'm still here.

LAURA: That's strange. Can I call you right back? Our connection just dropped out and you sound very quiet.

MASTER SERGEANT NOEL SUPELVEDA: Fine.

LAURA: I'm sorry. Thank you.

MASTER SERGEANT NOEL SUPELVEDA: Yes, Ma'am.

LAURA: I am so sorry.

MASTER SERGEANT NOEL SUPELVEDA: Oh, no problem, Ma'am.

LAURA: We have, kind of, shoddy phones once in a while. So, at this point, you hear him powering up his engines.

MASTER SERGEANT NOEL SUPELVEDA: Right. I hear him powering up his engines. And, [**he speaks to someone who enters his office**], excuse me, I'm sorry, Ma'am.

LAURA: No problem.

MASTER SERGEANT NOEL SUPELVEDA: All right. Okay. Yeah. So, then, they power up, like I said, it just went right into the Pentagon. And, at that time, for a brief second, you could actually see, you know, I think about 30 seconds [unintelligible], the tail sticking out for a minute, because the wings just disappeared. You know, they just exploded into nothing. And, the tail is just sitting out for a second. Then, the explosion and two fireballs. I mean, the side came out. And that's when I got knocked back up against a light pole where I was at and I hit the back of my head on the light pole. Kind of shook myself off, and then, as people are running out of the building, I was running towards the building. And then I started

LAURA: When you got thrown back, did you feel a lot of heat and

MASTER SERGEANT NOEL SUPELVEDA: I felt heat. I felt, you know, like you are being compressed for a moment, you know, kind of thing. And, just, it just felt like a, like a, think of it as a

giant incoming and just, bam, pushing you into the, into the pole kind of thing.

LAURA: Yeah. So, at this point, you start heading towards the site.

MASTER SERGEANT NOEL SUPELVEDA: I start heading towards the site. I tried, first, to go in through the one door, people were coming out and I was getting pushed. People were saying, get the hell out of here, you know. I mean, I'm trying to tell them, you know, hey, you know, I'm a medic, I'd like to get in there. It's all right. I saw that was futile. So, I ran around, and I ran right near, right where the impact site was, where all the fire was at. And, there were several other people around there. And I started grabbing people from there, and then I went in. there was a set of double doors that had blown, that had gotten blown out. And, so, I went in through there, and, started yelling for people. And, there was a, a civilian by the name of KIRK HANLET, I believe his name is.

LAURA: Do you know how to spell his last name?

MASTER SERGEANT NOEL SUPELVEDA: Right off, I think, I think I have, let me just check something real quick here.

LAURA: Thank you.

MASTER SERGEANT NOEL SUPELVEDA: I think I have his business card because I thought I had talked to him a couple of days ago. And, he gave me one of his business cards because he works at the

Pentagon itself, there. And, he, I believe he did give me one of his business cards. Let me just cruise this, and, there was also a, an officer, COLFELDER [sp.], he was a police officer at the Pentagon. And, he was also there. And, we started working together to pull people out of there. One of the things that MR. COLFELDER actually handed me a, what I, for a minute, I thought were a bunch of rags, but, actually, it was a baby. And, then, come to find out that, you know, the mother was also, was also there. Apparently, this lady had brought the baby in for her office folks to see him, kind of thing. There was several other people that we pulled out from that area. Then, you know, somebody [unintelligible] that the roof was about to collapse, we all needed to get out of there because it looked like the roof was getting ready to collapse in the whole area there. And, that's when we ran out, finally. And, sure enough, that whole section just came tumbling down. And, then, it just, you know, it slanted like what you saw in the pictures. Have you seen the pictures? That's when that whole are just came tumbling down. And, we were, you know, we felt pretty lucky that we didn't get killed at that, at that moment. So, and then, they ran towards the north and I ran towards the south. And, there's a little door there where I actually ran in and started yelling for, for more people. And, there was a police, some police officers there already. And, we kind of made a chain and started guiding people

out from that end over there, way at the south end. And, the gentleman's name is KIRK, K-I-R-K, last name is H-A-N-L-E-T.

LAURA: Okay. And, then, Officer . . .

MASTER SERGEANT NOEL SUPELVEDA: COLFELDER, GEORGE COLFELDER.

LAURA: And, how do you spell COLFELDER?

MASTER SERGEANT NOEL SUPELVEDA: Let me get his card. I want to make sure that I'm giving you the correct spelling for them. I don't, let me see if I've got it. I think I might have put his card somewhere else. Well, I know it's COLFELDER, C-O-L-F-E-L-D-E-R, I believe, COLFELDER. I'm not sure on that, on his, the spelling of his name. But, he's an officer, he's a police officer in the Pentagon. He works at the Pentagon itself.

LAURA: Okay. Did you continue to work the COLFELDER at this point?

MASTER SERGEANT NOEL SUPELVEDA: We worked for a while together, then, he ran towards the north because, you know, by then, we, you know, we were all pretty much drenched and all that. And, the other thing is, when we ran out, there was a fire engine there that was also, had caught on fire.

LAURA: Really?

MASTER SERGEANT NOEL SUPELVEDA: Yeah. And, we wanted to get away from that also because of the, we felt that, you know, and sure enough, that fire engine exploded a few minutes later. That was the third explosion, I think, that a lot of people heard.

Because, they, you know, there was several explosions. And, that was one of the third explosions that people heard. And, then, from there, when the, Arlington County came, they took control of the scene and told us we couldn't go back into the building. So, I ran up towards the top of the hill and starting triaging and treating patients and getting patients onto the, onto the ambulances and that, before they started screaming that there was another inbound plane. When they started screaming that there was another inbound plane, we started putting patients that couldn't walk on backboards and running down underneath the 27 overpass. And, everybody started running towards that way. We went down underneath there and we started setting up a triage site, MAJOR MOORE and a bunch of other folks, and we, we kind of saw that everything was kind of, you know, loosely then, so, we started trying to organize things as quickly as possible. And we started organizing all of the, all of the different assets, the people that had medical knowledge, the people that didn't have medical knowledge and how we can utilize all the, all the folks because everybody wanted to help. You know, and, I, you know, I thank God that there was so much support and all of that, so many people there. And, so, we got, we got everybody a task so everybody felt like they were doing something. I grabbed a lot of folks and I, and I said, you know, I need one of you medical people to grab non-medical people and teach them how to spike

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IV's and get IV's ready so that if we need to stick people with IV's we already have the whole set-up all ready and all we have to do is just grab and start doing it. And, I, and getting other people and started doing other, other things, and, you know, basic, got another group of people to try and start learning how to at least do basic vital signs, kind of thing, real quick. And, we just started organizing as best as we could from that point on.

LAURA: Okay. Now, at this point, would you say that MAJOR MOORE was in charge of organizing everything, or, were there other people?

MASTER SERGEANT NOEL SUPELVEDA: There were other people all there. There was a one star, I think he was a commander, Naval commander, there. He was also trying to do some coordinating. And then I went up to the top, when they gave us the all clear, I went back up towards the top, you know, because they were pulling out a few more people, I think, and everything up there was kind of, all, you know, nobody really knew what they were doing. The next thing I knew, I'm handed a bullhorn and somebody says, could you help us organize this thing. So, I grabbed the bull horn, and, I think that's the one picture that they have on the website, where I'm standing there with a bullhorn underneath my arm. GENERAL CARLTON [sp.] is on one side and there is a civilian doctor on the other side.

LAURA: And, which website is this on?

MASTER SERGEANT NOEL SUPELVEDA: This was up on top of the hill.
Could you hold on just one second?

LAURA: Sure.

MASTER SERGEANT NOEL SUPELVEDA: Thank you.

LAURA: No problem.

MASTER SERGEANT NOEL SUPELVEDA: Yeah, so, then . . .

LAURA: Okay, and, where is this picture?

MASTER SERGEANT NOEL SUPELVEDA: It's on the website. They have
[unintelligible] on the website. If you go over to the Air Force
website, and you go to gallery, and, actually, the 11th, and you
look at the, September 11th, with them, it's all those pictures
that they have there. They have that one picture.

LAURA: Great. And, do you recall when you were helping pull
people out, initially, before Arlington told you to get out of
there, do you remember if most of those people were without
injury or had minor injuries?

MASTER SERGEANT NOEL SUPELVEDA: Oh, no, we, we pulled out some
people with minor. As a matter of fact, the first person I
grabbed was KIRK. And, he had, both of us, shirt sleeves, he had
a long sleeve shirt on. And, both of us, sleeves, were torn. So,
I thought he was severely injured, but he wasn't. Apparently he
tore the sleeves off somehow. But, most of the people that we
pulled out were burns, a lot of blood injury, trauma they had

received. A lot of, a few people were bleeding from shrapnel cuts that they had gotten. And, we, we did see quite a bit of, you know.

LAURA: Did the mother of the baby that you pulled out get reunited with the baby pretty soon afterwards?

MASTER SERGEANT NOEL SUPELVEDA: We got them both together. Now what, and I'm not really clear on it, but, I believe KIRK told me that the baby survived, but, afterwards the mother passed away at the hospital.

LAURA: Okay.

MASTER SERGEANT NOEL SUPELVEDA: And, I think, I believe that's what he had told me, and, so, I was pretty devastated when I found that out. Because, you know, here this lady, you know, brings her child and her child survives and she doesn't make it. You know, not an easy thing to handle.

LAURA: Yeah. When you were above the overpass, later on, trying to help organize things with the bullhorn, did things seem to be going pretty well? Were people listening to people's attempts to organize?

MASTER SERGEANT NOEL SUPELVEDA: Initially, it was a little bit hard, but, then, afterwards, when we told them listen, you know, we appreciate you guys out there, but, we need to get this organized properly. And, that's when, one of the picture there, you'll see there's a bunch of people there with backboards,

because I told them, everybody that doesn't have medical knowledge, grab a backboard and stand over there and go see CHIEF WALGO [sp.]. I put CHIEF WALGO in charge of all of those people. I called, told them, you are my manpower folks. If we need to carry people, we'll call you, and you come over and grab them and we'll get them to you and then you can put them on the ambulances. And then, I got, you know, I asked everybody that was, all the doctors, all the people that had nursing [unintelligible] and all med tags and EMT's and then anybody that had any kind of medical experience kind of thing. And, that's how we started organizing everybody and setting up the triage areas. Because one of the things we learned in medical, you know, the medical schools is, you know, you establish a casualty collection point, number one, then you establish triage and triage areas, you know, from immediate, to delayed, to expected, you know, red, green and yellow areas. You know, the ones that need care immediately, the ones that can wait a little bit and the ones that we know that, unfortunately, you know, we are just going to try and make as comfortable as we can, pending their, you know, their device kind of thing.

LAURA: Where did you receive this training?

MASTER SERGEANT NOEL SUPELVEDA: I have been a medic with the United States Air Force since I came into the Air Force. I have

done other jobs in the Air Force, but, my main job is, I was a medic in Vietnam. And, I was a medic during Desert Storm.

LAURA: Okay. And, have you received any training more recently? Or, was this part of your job right now?

MASTER SERGEANT NOEL SUPELVEDA: No. No, actually, I was here in an administrative capacity for the last year and a half. But, what I have done is, I have, the 459th, and I thank them, because the 459th allowed me to go and, even though I was here as a admin, you know, doing personnel and administrative duties, I still have to maintain my professions, see, because my primary [unintelligible] until it changes, is still medical. So, I have to insure that I'm maintaining my medical proficiencies. And, they allowed me to drill with them on the weekends and keep my medical skills up to par.

LAURA: Okay. When you were up above the overpass, what time would you say it was when you started seeing the last victims go out in the ambulances?

MASTER SERGEANT NOEL SUPELVEDA: I'd say something like 10:00 or so, 10:30, around that time. That's when they started yelling that there was another inbound plane and that we needed to get underneath the overpass because there's possible, another attack imminent. And, then, from that point on after, we got the all clear. Then we started scrounging back. We scrambled away from the building several times because afterwards they started

receiving bomb threat phone calls. You know, so, every, just when we thought we had everything organized, they'd call us, everybody got to go back, got to go back, we got another bomb threat. You know, so, and that, those are the things that delayed us getting in there and trying to do more, you know, get more people out, that might have, you know, been there, still, you know, living. The fact that there were just, you know, every few minutes we were, we were, had another setback because another bomb threat came in. And those things, you know, don't help.

LAURA: Did you stay there for the rest of the day and into the night?

MASTER SERGEANT NOEL SUPELVEDA: I worked the rest of the day and I was there all through the night. And, as a matter of fact, one of the funny things that happened was, I, I completely forgot. I got so wrapped up in working, I completely forgot to call my family to let them know that I was okay. And, it was on the 12th, around 3:00 in the afternoon when somebody said, you know, could I use your cell phone? And, I, so, I had a cell phone. Okay? And completely forgot to call my family. This guy, could I use your cell phone to call my family? And, that's when it dawned on me, oh my God, I haven't called my family. So, after he got finished, I called my family to let them know that I was okay. That time my son said, oh Dad, yeah, we knew you were okay. And,

I said, what do you mean you knew I was okay? Yeah, we saw you on television yesterday taking care of patients. And, I said, really? He said, yeah, yeah, some guy had a camera in your face and we saw you on TV taking somebody into an ambulance. And, I said, wow, didn't know that.

LAURA: So, you didn't leave until?

MASTER SERGEANT NOEL SUPELVEDA: I didn't leave, around, I believe it was around 7:30, 8:00 on the 12th when an Army [unintelligible] colonel came up to me and said, SERGEANT SEPULVEDA, I heard that you have not left the site since yesterday when this whole mess started. I am ordering you, right now, to leave, and go home and get some rest. So, I went home and rested the best I could till, then I came back the, on the morning of the 13th. Because, I had been on the, on the 11th, when GENERAL CARLTON was there, I briefed him as to what I had done and he appointed me the on-scene medical coordinator. Some people call it commander. Basically, trying to coordinate and insure that all the medical assets were being properly utilized and that there was good communication between the military and the civilian medical folks that were there. And, making sure that, that everything was maintained, organized and everything else. And, all little things like that.

LAURA: Okay. And, so, you were the on-scene medical commander after the 13th?

MASTER SERGEANT NOEL SUPELVEDA: No, on the 11th when GENERAL CARLTON came out, he appointed me that. Yeah.

LAURA: Okay. Who took over for you when you left?

MASTER SERGEANT NOEL SUPELVEDA: I stayed there, Ma'am, until the 22nd of September when they finally started downsizing everything. And, on the 22nd [unintelligible] took over the scaled down operation. And then on the 27th, they handed, the FBI folks handed back all of the jurisdictional and everything to the DC Guard, our Corp of Engineers and the Pentagon Building Management folks took control of the building again. And then we were all, everybody was disbanded to go back to their, to their respective places. But, I was there from the 11th until the 22nd, Ma'am. Everyday from, I would get there at 5:00 in the morning and I probably wouldn't leave until about 10:00 at night.

LAURA: Okay. And, what would you say were your primary responsibilities?

MASTER SERGEANT NOEL SUPELVEDA: Ensuring that we have full coverage for medical, maintaining the teams, because after, after the people that were there were to respond to any emergency that arose from people going into the building, body recovery, going in to do body, excuse me, body recovering. I assisted in helping the morgue set up and get running. I went in to the building to, with some of the teams, to insure that the young men that were going in to recover the bodies were okay and

kept an eye on them to make sure that, you know, things were being done in a proper manner. And that each one of these young folks were, you know, handling it okay. And helping to bring bodies out, kind of thing.

LAURA: Do you know if there was any kind of disaster plan in place?

MASTER SERGEANT NOEL SUPELVEDA: Yeah, one of the things that I have to, that I have to say, you know, I thank God for GENERAL CARLTON. The reason I say that is because GENERAL CARLTON is one of the few folks I know that has, you know, foresight instead of hindsight. A couple of months before this happened, GENERAL CARLTON in a, there was a medical kind of conference in the Pentagon going on that he had. And, one of the questions he asked, and one of the things that he requested that be done was to set up some sort of a disaster plan. Because he, he stated at that time, you know, we have Reagan National right there. And, you never known when a disaster can happen where a pilot can get disoriented or something happened. And, since they are coming down from the Potomac, we were thinking, we are always figuring, you know, they would probably hit, if a plane, you know, were to veer off course, it would probably hit on the river side. But, there was a plan he devised with the Lorenzo Clinic and all, that they did devise a plan for mass casualty for, you know, an accidental strike over an aircraft to the Pentagon.

LAURA: Okay. Were you aware of the details of this plan?

MASTER SERGEANT NOEL SUPELVEDA: No, I was not aware of the details, but, I did find out afterwards, and I did find out that those, the, a lot of what was done, especially on the inner corridor and everything else, was put into effect. And GENERAL CARLTON actually came and put the plan into effect and actually worked the plan from the inside out. So, he was on the inside. I was outside, doing some coordinating, with a bunch of other folks, because it was, it was a, you know, joint effort with everybody coordinating and trying to get things, you know, coordinated and done. And, he was on the inside doing the same thing. That, around, right, I think they said it was about 12:00, 12:30 when he came out and asked, you know, who is in charge out here? And, a bunch of people pointed at me, the guy with the bullhorn, and, I think that's the reason why he, more than anything, you know, appointed me to continue, you know, overseeing the whole thing because I was the guy with the bullhorn.

LAURA: Yeah. Was there anyone on the outside that you worked with very closely through that time?

MASTER SERGEANT NOEL SUPELVEDA: Oh, yes, Ma'am. There was LIEUTENANT COLONEL, Army LIEUTENANT COLONEL, let's see if I can get her name, PATTY HOROHO. She was, she was there that first

day. You can call her and she'll tell you. We worked hand-in-hand, her and I.

LAURA: PATTY HOROHO.

MASTER SERGEANT NOEL SUPELVEDA: Yeah, PATTY HOROHO, H-O-R-O-H-O, LIEUTENANT COLONEL.

LAURA: And, was GENERAL CARLTON, is that spelled C-A-R-L-T-O-N?

MASTER SERGEANT NOEL SUPELVEDA: I believe, yeah, GENERAL PAUL CARLTON.

LAURA: And, is he in, which branch is he in?

MASTER SERGEANT NOEL SUPELVEDA: He is the Surgeon General for the United States Air Force.

LAURA: Okay.

MASTER SERGEANT NOEL SUPELVEDA: He is one very, very intelligent man. One man that has good foresight vision. I have to say, Ma'am.

LAURA: Do you, have you learned any lessons from that day, whether it's just personal or professional in planning, or?

MASTER SERGEANT NOEL SUPELVEDA: Both. I would say both.

Personal, I learned, you know, that we can never take anything for granted. We, you know, myself, I've always felt, we are the United States, we are very safe. Nothing can happen to us here. Nobody can touch us here. Well, I learned that that's not true. That we get too complacent. We get too assured of what we are and where we are and we let our guard down. And that's when

these tragedies happen. And, so, that was rather hard for me to take. Can you hold on one second, Ma'am?

LAURA: Sure.

MASTER SERGEANT NOEL SUPELVEDA: I'm sorry. So, basically, you know, I learned that we really need to remember that we are, you know, we are in the best country in the world, but, we still need, if we want to keep it that way, we have to be more vigilant. We have to be more, more resolved and more importantly, we have to remember that it is our country and we have to defend it. On a professional note, I learned that it is important for us, in the military, to remember, you know, that the people around us need us, but, and we have to maintain good working relations with the folks around us. You know, because one of the things I did see was the fact that when Arlington County came in the military got a little bit, you know, it was, there was some friction there as to who was in charge, as to who does what. And that's why, you know, it's really important to maintain, to try and get that liaison thing going between everybody because there was, there was some, you know, some chest, you know, people, you know, bringing their chest out, I'm the one that, you know, this is Arlington County, we have, we have control of the scene. No, this is a military issue, we have control of the scene, kind of thing, you know, back and forth. And it, that took a while, but, we, you know, I remember I

stepped up between this, I don't know, I can't remember the name, this Captain from Arlington County and one of the other folks that was there, trying to do some coordinating. And I stepped, I had to step between them and tell them, gentlemen, we are here for one thing, and one thing only, to try and save the lives of people. We are not here to see who's got the biggest chest. So, it's time that you two, you know, back off and let's get to doing the job that we're supposed to be doing here, and, that is, to try to get some lives saved.

LAURA: What do you think would be the, the best way for us to improve that?

MASTER SERGEANT NOEL SUPELVEDA: I, I believe that we should be, at least, if no, it should be done at least twice a year, but, at least once a year, the Air Force, the Army, all the branch of services, should get together with the local emergency services and do a one-day mass casualty training exercise. Where everybody is cognizant of who does what piece of the operation and so that we can get a good flow between all the services and all of the, and, when I say all the services, I'm talking about military and civilian services, the ambulance services, the hospitals, everybody, so we have that. Because, we've been doing it down in Patrick Air Force Base for a while now, and that, it's something that has been very helpful, you know, the good coordination. And I think that needs to be done up here so that

everybody knows, and that everybody is kept in the loop, that, hey, if something happens, we'll respond. We know who's got control of the scene at what given time and we are not going to argue over anything. And we are just going to come in and everybody is going to work together like we should be, one well oiled machine.

LAURA: So, would you say that, that day, it wasn't necessarily chaotic but that it could have . . .

MASTER SERGEANT NOEL SUPELVEDA: It wasn't necessarily chaotic, but it could have been a bit better. You know, if people had, you know, if some, some folks hadn't have tried to exert their authority, kind of thing, yeah.

LAURA: What, if anything, that day, would you have done differently?

MASTER SERGEANT NOEL SUPELVEDA: Not got to take my test.

[Laughter]. I'm sorry. [Laughter].

LAURA: No. No.

MASTER SERGEANT NOEL SUPELVEDA: I don't think there's much of anything that I would have done differently other than try to be more consistent on trying to get more people out than what I got out. I think we could have gotten a lot more people out. And, if we had just been a little bit more, you know, forceful as far as trying to get in and trying to get out, kind of thing.

LAURA: Yeah. Do you have any moments that stick out in your mind?

MASTER SERGEANT NOEL SUPELVEDA: Well, like I said, the moment where the baby was handed to me was one of the moments that stuck out of my mind. There's two ladies, one that, she had a, her right hand was burnt, she had blood coming out from the, excuse me, left hand was burnt, blood coming out from the right side of the ear. You could tell that she had gotten hit by, by some of that plaster in the face because her face was, had powdery white on it. She was very disoriented and everything else. And, she came looking up at me and saying, please help me, please help me. And, the other lady that we pulled out that, about 90% body burn, and, we got her out just when, just when the, hold on one second, please?

LAURA: Sure.

MASTER SERGEANT NOEL SUPELVEDA: Basically, you know, just, seeing, seeing her and just at that moment they started yelling about the inbound plane. We couldn't get her into an ambulance and we had to take her underneath the overpass and trying to reassure her. And, when she would, she would kind of look to the side and she says, I am going to be okay, ain't I? I am going to be okay? And we tell her, yeah, we are going to do our best to try and make it okay. She passed away about two days later at the hospital, which was, was quite hard for us when you are

dealing with folks like that. You know, and the fact that, as a military person, dealing in the medical field, your mind is usually geared towards dealing with and caring for a soldier in the battlefield or, you know, or something like that. And, you justify what you see and you justify and you work with them because you say to yourself, they knew going in what the risks were. They knew that there was a great possibility of injury and maybe even death. And they accepted that responsibility and took the challenge to do this. So, it helped us, in a way, to be able to treat the patient and be able to do it objectively. But, the Pentagon turned me, you know, to a, you know, threw me for a loop. When you are seeing, you know, civilians that didn't sign up for this, that weren't expecting, that felt they were in the most safe and secure building in the world, and then they are looking at you and saying, you know, that, sort of, like, why did this have to happen? Why did it have to happen to me? That stays with you for quite a while. I was not prepared for that. I think one of the other lessons that I learned and one of the things that we probably need to do is realize that the world has changed in that aspect. And we need to maybe look at our medical folks and tell them, you know, hey, this may happen and you may have to deal with this and let's, let's get you trained for this aspect also.

LAURA: Have you been involved in any future disaster plans?

MASTER SERGEANT NOEL SUPELVEDA: No, Ma'am, I have not.

LAURA: All right. Do you have anything else to add?

MASTER SERGEANT NOEL SUPELVEDA: No, other than, you know, I just thank God, first of all, for, you know, watching over me and keeping me safe that day. And, more importantly, for having me in the place where he needed me to be to at least be somewhat effective to do what little I could do. I just wish I could have done more.

LAURA: Yeah, everybody says that. You've been an amazing thing for a lot of people.

MASTER SERGEANT NOEL SUPELVEDA: Well, you know, a lot of people call me a hero and all of that and I don't feel that way. You know, I did what the Air Force has trained me to do for so many years. And, you know, I look at that, and, one of the things, I guess, that bothers me a little bit is, we don't hear a whole lot about the folks that lost their lives in Pennsylvania. You know, if I were to categorize a true hero, are those people that decided, they were, give up their lives, to save countless thousands. And we don't hear a lot about those people. They are like, you know, that never happened. I mean, when was the last time that on television and the news or somewhere you heard about, you know, people like JEREMY that were up in that plane that started to, you know, take matters and try to, to subdue some of the attackers that were in that plane? You don't hear

much about those people, those families, what their families are going through. I have not heard anything that they are saying about trying to help their families also. You know, they're, they've been shoved way back in the background and it's a shame because those are the true heroes to me, those that gave their lives to save thousands.

LAURA: Well, hopefully the government and the public is going to open their eyes to that.

MASTER SERGEANT NOEL SUPELVEDA: I really hope they do.

LAURA: I thank you so, so much for giving me your time today. I really appreciate it.

MASTER SERGEANT NOEL SUPELVEDA: No problem, Ma'am.

LAURA: And,